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Letter dated 20 September 2011 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I would like to bring to your attention a matter of great concern regarding the acute shortage of military helicopters in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

MONUSCO currently has only 14 military helicopters, comprising 10 utility helicopters and 4 observation helicopters. The Mission is facing a shortfall of six military utility helicopters. The Mission has no attack helicopters at this time.

MONUSCO military helicopter assets are deployed exclusively in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, namely in the Kivus and Province Orientale. Of the Mission's 10 military utility helicopters, 6 are deployed in Province Orientale in support of military operations to address the presence of the Lord's Resistance Army, whose murderous attacks against civilians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have once again been on the rise, as well as remnant Ituri militia. The remaining four military utility helicopters are deployed in the Kivus; two of these are light helicopters with reduced capacity.

The impact of the shortage of military helicopters on the implementation of the MONUSCO mandate has become critical. Joint operations with the Congolese Armed Forces have had to be postponed, investigations of allegations of mass human rights violations have had to be delayed, and some deployments to protection hot-spots have had to be deferred. Getting essential supplies to United Nations troops in far-flung, volatile areas has also been extremely difficult. This is made all the more critical in the run-up to presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 28 November 2011.

The Secretariat has vigorously pursued contacts with troop-contributing countries over the past year regarding the provision of military helicopters. As a result, South Africa has pledged to provide MONUSCO with an additional military utility helicopter.

The Secretariat is also closely involved with the Security Council members and other Member States to address the root causes of this critical capability gap across United Nations peacekeeping operations, thinking "outside the box" for new and innovative solutions. I have personally led several of these initiatives, and we have been actively supported in these efforts by a number of Member States.

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However, we do not foresee a deployment of additional military helicopter assets to MONUSCO, beyond the pledge by South Africa, before the end of this year.

Critical capability gaps within United Nations peacekeeping operations are unfortunately not confined to MONUSCO. However, the current lack of military helicopters in MONUSCO has become acute, and it is my duty to inform you that the Mission is no longer able to carry out critical parts of its priority mandated tasks, including in relation to the protection of civilians, providing support to the elections and putting an end to the presence of armed groups, particularly in the Kivus.

I am concerned that if this situation is not addressed by the Security Council, the largest United Nations peacekeeping operation will be at risk of failure, with serious consequences for lives and livelihoods for the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The credibility of the Council and of the United Nations is also at risk.

I would be grateful if you could bring the present letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) **BAN** Ki-moon